

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 SCCT-01 SY-04 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EUR-12 SAM-01 OMB-01 /074 W

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R 190900Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1715

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 5053

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, SN

SUBJECT: STUDENT PROTEST BEGINS TO SIMMER DOWN

REFS: (A) 4983 SINGAPORE; (B) SINGAPORE 5014

1. SUMMARY. THE STUDENT UNION'S CALL FOR A BOYCOTT OF CLASSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE HAS BEEN ONLY 50 PERCENT EFFECTIVE AND THE CURRENT PHASE OF STUDENT PROTEST SHOWS SIGNS OF PETERING OUT. EVIDENCE THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS BREATHING MORE EASILY WAS SEEN IN PRIME MINISTER LEE'S DECISION TO FLY TO HONG KONG YESTERDAY FOR A FEW DAYS OF HOLIDAY LEAVE ALTHOUGH THE UNIVERSITY IS LIKELY TO REMAIN FAIRLY QUIET DURING THE HOLIDAYS AND EXAMINATION PERIOD IN JANUARY, STUDENT ACTIVISTS HAVE DEMONSTRATED THAT THEY ARE PREPARED TO DEFY UNIVERSITY AUTHORITIES OPENLY AND IN THE PROCESS HAVE GAINED THE ADMIRATION AND SUPPORT OF A SIGNIFNSANT NUMBER OF STUDENTS. THUS IT
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SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE STUDENTS WILL BE HEARD FROM AGAIN.

END SUMMARY.

2. DURING THE PAST TWO DAYS THE BOYCOTT OF CLASSES CALLED FOR BY THE STUDENT UNION (USSU) HAS ONLY BEEN PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL AND STUDENT LEADERS ARE DISAPPOINTED IT DID NOT ACHIEVE GREATER SUCCESS. THE LOCAL PRESS GENERALLY PLAYED DOWN THE BOYCOTT AND PUBLISHED CONFLICTING REPORTS AS TO HOW WELL IT WAS OBSERVED. ACCORDING TO THESE ACCOUNTS AND OTHER EMBASSY SOURCES, APPROXIMATELY 50 PERCENT OF THE STUDENTS PARTICIPATED. LAW SOCIETY, ENGINEERING AND ARCHITECTURAL STUDENTS STRONGLY SUPPORTED THE BOYCOTT. HOWEVER, THE HISTORY SOCIETY AND SOME OTHER ORGANIZATIONS OPPOSED THE BOYCOTT. SOME TEACHERS IN SYMPATHY WITH THE BOYCOTT DID NOT HOLD CLASSES DURING THE 48 HOUR PERIOD.

3. THE FUGITIVE STUDENT, TSUI HON KWONG, IS STILL AT LARGE AND CREATED SOME PUBLICITY BY SENDING THE USSU A TAPE-RECORDING WHICH WAS PLAYED AT A STUDENT RALLY. HE REQUESTED GUIDANCE WHETHER HE SHOULD TURN HIMSELF OVER TO THE AUTHORITIES. THE USSU HAS SENT A LETTER TO VICE-CHANCELLOR TOH REQUESTING EITHER THE CANCELLATION OF THE EXPULSION ORDER OR ELSE AN ASSURANCE THAT IF TSUI GIVES HIMSELF UP HE WILL NOT BE CHARGED AND BE ASSURED A SAFE DEPARTURE FROM SINGAPORE.

4. ON DECEMBER 18 A NUMBER OF STUDENTS CONSTRUCTED A SMALL BRICK MONUMENT ON CAMPUS COMMEMORATING THE BOYCOTT ACTION. MEANWHILE, THE USSU WAS INFORMED BY THE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION THAT IT WAS ILLEGAL TO BUILD ANY STRUCTURE ON CAMPUS WITHOUT THE UNIVERSITY'S PERMISSION. THE STUDENTS ARE REPORTEDLY GUARDING THE MONUMENT.

5. THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO ACT AS IF EVERYTHING HAD RETURNED TO NORMAL AND LEE KUAN YEW FLEW TO HONG KONG ON DECEMBER 19 FOR A FEW DAYS OF HOLIDAY LEAVE.

6. COMMENT: FROM ALL INDICATIONS THE CURRENT PHASE OF THE STUDENT PROTEST MOVEMENT IS PETERING OUT AND THE PROSPECT OF ANY VIOLENCE NOW SEEMS MOST UNLIKELY. NEXT WEEK THE UNIVERSITY IS IN RECESS FOR THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS' AND IN JANUARY SINGAPOREAN
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STUDENTS CUSTOMARILY DEVOTE THEMSELVES TO INTENSIVE PREPARATIONS FOR FINAL EXAMINATIONS HELD IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH. NEXT SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS IN JULY. THUS IT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR USSU TO GENERATE AGITATION ON A LARGE SCALE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS. MEANWHILE, THE TRIAL OF USSU PRESIDENT TAN WAH PIOW CONTINUES AND SHOULD BE CONCLUDED WITHIN A FEW DAYS. IF HE IS FOUND GUILTY, HE MAY WELL BE SENTENCED TO JAIL OR SEVERELY FINED. ALTHOUGH TEAMS OF STUDENTS ARE CURRENTLY CALLING ON

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND TOURING THE CONSTITUENCIES TRYING TO DRUM UP SUPPORT FOR THEIR CAUSE, THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS THAT THEY ARE HAVING ANY SUCCESS. FURTHERMORE, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT THE AVERAGE SINGAPORE CITIZEN IS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED OVER THE EXPULSION OF FOREIGN STUDENTS.

7. UP TO NOW ONLY 50 PERCENT OF THE STUDENT BODY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE HAS ATTENDED THE RALLIES AND OF THIS NUMBER ONLY 200 TO 300 COULD BE DESCRIBED AS REAL ACTIVISTS. HOWEVER, THIS IS AN EXTRAORDINARY CHANGE AT A UNIVERSITY WHOSE STUDENT BODY SEEMED SO TOTALLY APATHETIC AND APOLITICAL ONLY A SHORT TIME AGO. ASSUMING THAT THE UNIVERSITY QUIETS DOWN DURING EXAMINATION PERIOD, THE AUTHORITIES WILL BE PONDERING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS AND WILL PROBABLY BE CONSIDERING THE BEST WAY OF CURBING USSU ACTIVITIES IN THE FUTURE. THE STUDENT ACTIVISTS, WHO OBTAINED A SURPRISING DEGREE OF STUDENT SUPPORT OVER THE PAST TEN DAYS, WILL PROBABLY BE LOOKING FOR NEW ISSUES AND WAYS TO ASSERT STUDENT INDEPENDENCE AND TO BROADEN THE MOVEMENT BEYOND THE CAMPUS. THUS WHILE IT APPEARS THAT THE CURRENT PHASE OF STUDENT PROTEST HAS RUN ITS COURSE, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT STUDENT ACTIVISTS WILL BE TEMPTED TO TRY AGAIN NEXT YEAR.

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